

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 01476 041617Z
ACTION SS-25

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P R 041602Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2049
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1476

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, US
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 0898

1. SUMMARY:

IT NOT REALISTIC TO PLAN RETURN ADF TO NABATIYAH AND
TYRE BECAUSE OF CHANGED PERCEPTIONS SYRIANS,
LEBANESE AND ISRAELIS. END SUMMARY

2. THIS EMBASSY ORIGINALLY VIEWED THE DEPLOYMENT
OF ADF FORCES THROUGH SOUTH LEBANESE AS
THE MOST RATIONAL AND EFFICIENT WAY TO RESTORE ORDER TO
THAT AREA, ARGUING IT NEED NOT BE TAKEN AS A PRECEDENT.
GIVEN ISRAELI MILITARY POWER AND POLITICAL DETERMINATION,
THE SYRIANS COULD HAVE BEEN SENT PACKING AT A Y TIME.
HOWEVER, THE EXTRAORDINARILY SHARP ISRAELI REACTION WHICH
DEVELOPED BETWEEN JANUARY 23 AND FEBRUARY 14, WHEN DAMASCUS
WENT ALONG WITH SARKIS' ORDER TO WITHDRAW ADF FORCES NORTH-
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WARDS, HAS RENDERED THIS AN UNREALISTIC OPTION FOR FORESEEABLE
FUTURE. WE HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE THAT GOI IS RETHINKING
ITS OPPOSITION.

3. FURTHERMORE, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CONVINCE SARG TO
RETURN TO THE SOUTH. ASAD MANAGED TO ESCAPE SERIOUS POLITICAL
EMBARRASSMENT BY PINNING THE ROSE ON SARKIS AS ADF OVERALL COMMANDER.

ASAD TATED PUBLICLY THAT IF HE HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE, HE NEVER WOULD HAVE WITHDRAWN THE TROOPS NORTHWARDS. IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THE SYRIANS WERE TO AGREE TO SEE THEIR MEN REDEPLOYED TO THE SOUTH, THE WOULD PROBABLY DEMAND A FREE HAND TO DO THE JOB IN THE WAY THEY (AND SARKIS) SAW BEST. WE RECALL SEVERAL INTELLIGENCE REPORTS AFTER JANUARY 23 INDICATING SYRIAN ADF UNITS WERE THEN NEITHER COLLECTING ARMS NOR IMPEDING THE MOVEMENT OF FEDAYEEN. IN THE SOUTH, AS ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON, THE SYRIANS WOULD MOVE TO CONFISCATE ARMS AND OTHERWISE DISCIPLINE THE FEDAYEEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH SYRIA'S OWN TIME SCHEDULE.

4. ALSO MILITATING AGAINST RETURN OF ADF FORCES IN FACT THERE IS LESS CONCERGENCE OF SYRO-ISRAELI INTERESTS OVER LEBANON TODAY. FOR SEVERAL MONTHS DURING 1976 THE TACITLY AGREED FRAMEWORK FOR SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN THE CIVIL WAR REFLECTED SYRIAN INTEREST IN PRVENTING ESTABLISHMENT OF A RADICAL LEFTIST GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON, AND ISRAELI PLEASURE IN LETTING ASAD BREAK PALESTINIAN HEADS. TODAY THE TREAT OF A RADICAL LEBANESE GOVERNMENT EMERGING HAS RECEDED AND LEBANESE MARONITES HAVE GROWN INCREASILY CONFIDENT OF THEIR OWN ABILITY (WITH ACTIVE ISRAELI ASSISTANCE) TO MAINTAIN SECURITY AT LEAST ALONG THE SOUTH BORDER.

5. FOR ALL THESE REASONS, WE SEE NO PROFIT IN PURSUING OPTION FO TRYING TO URGE ANY OF THE PARTIES TO PERMIT STATIONING OF THE ARAB SECURITY FROCE INCLUDING SYRIANS AT NABATIYAH OR TYPE.

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